

"A SOLDIER KNOWN BUT TO GOD"

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In 1921, an American soldier—his name “known but to God”—was buried on a Virginia hillside overlooking the Potomac River and the city of Washington, DC. The burial site of this unknown World War I soldier in Arlington National Cemetery symbolized dignity and reverence for America’s veterans.

Similar ceremonies occurred earlier in England and France, where an “unknown soldier” of the Great War was buried in each nation’s highest place of honor (in England, Westminster Abbey; in France, the Arc de Triomphe).

These memorial gestures all took place on November 11, giving universal recognition to the celebrated ending of World War I hostilities at 11 a.m., November 11, 1918 (the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month). The day became known as “Armistice Day.”

Armistice Day officially received its name in America in 1926 through a Congressional resolution. It became a national holiday 12 years later by similar Congressional action. If World War I had indeed been “the war to end all wars,” November 11 might still be called Armistice Day. But in 1939, World War II broke out in Europe and shattered that dream. Of the 16 million Americans who served in the Armed Forces during World War II, more than 400,000 died.



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